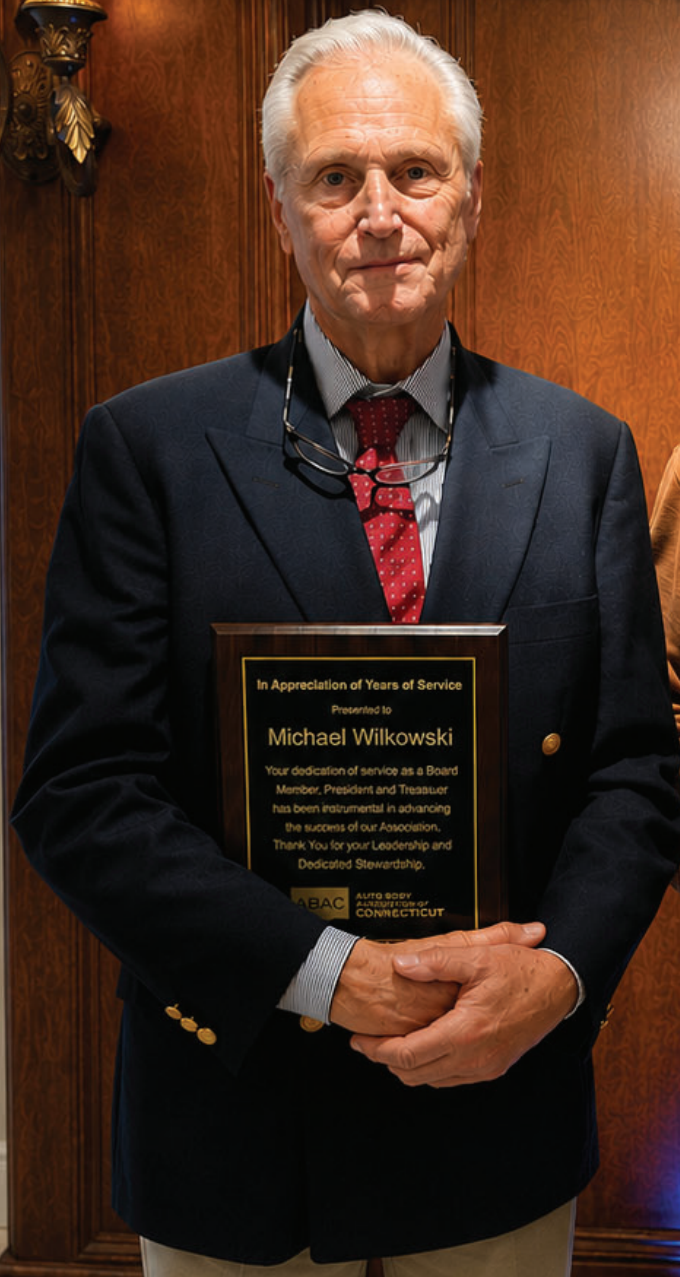


ABAC NEWS

Auto Body Association of Connecticut

May-June 2026 Edition

Mike & Mark Wilkowski Reflecting on Their Work with the Auto Body Association of Connecticut serving as Officers



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The goal of the ABAC News is to provide a forum for the free expression of ideas. The opinions and ideas appearing in this publication are not necessarily representations of the ABAC and should not be construed as legal advice.

From the Desk of ABAC President

Bob Amendola

Unity, Advocacy, and Moving Forward



As we move through another busy summer season, I want to take a moment to encourage all of our members to stay engaged, stay connected, and continue standing up for both your businesses and your customers.

One of the greatest strengths of ABAC has always been the sense of community among our members. The challenges we face in this industry are significant, but they become much easier to navigate

when we work together, share ideas, and support one another. That's why I hope you'll join us for two outstanding upcoming association events.

Our annual Summer Social will be held on **Friday, August 14, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at Haven Beer Co. in Hamden, Connecticut.** This event is always a great opportunity to step away from the day-to-day demands of the business, reconnect with colleagues, meet new members, and strengthen the relationships that make our association so valuable. A good time is always had by all, and I encourage you to come out and join us.

We are also looking forward to our **Annual Golf Tournament on Wednesday, September 2 at Lyman Orchards Golf Club.** Registration is now open for both golfers and sponsors. Whether you're signing up as an individual golfer or bringing a foursome, this event offers a fantastic day of golf, networking, food, and industry camaraderie at one of Connecticut's premier courses.

For our industry partners and vendors, sponsorship opportunities are available now and provide an excellent way to showcase your company while supporting both the association and this longstanding event. We encourage sponsors to reserve their spots early to maximize visibility and participation.

Beyond our events, I want to leave you with an important reminder about the work we do every day.

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As repair professionals, we must continue to advocate for proper repairs and fair reimbursement. Too often, insurance carriers attempt to dictate pricing, procedures, or reimbursement levels that do not reflect the true cost of repairing a vehicle safely and correctly.

While we should always remain professional, transparent, and honest with our customers, we cannot lose sight of a simple fact: **this is not our fight.**

The responsibility for reimbursement lies between the policyholder or claimant and the insurer. Our responsibility is to properly document the repairs, explain the process, and assist our customers in understanding their options. We should help them navigate the process whenever possible, but we should not assume the burden of accepting arbitrary short pays simply because an insurer chooses not to fully reimburse a claim.

When a carrier refuses to pay for necessary repairs or appropriate labor and materials, it is often the customer who has the contractual relationship and the legal standing to challenge that decision. By educating customers, providing clear documentation, and empowering them to advocate for themselves, we help put the discussion where it belongs—between the insurer and the vehicle owner.

Our industry has made significant progress because shop owners across Connecticut have been willing to stand firm, speak with one voice, and refuse to compromise on safe and proper repairs. I encourage you to continue that effort. Stay informed, stay involved with ABAC, and continue supporting one another as we work toward a stronger future for our industry.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our upcoming events.

Bob Amendola

Autoworks of Westville

President - Auto Body Association of Connecticut



"COMING TOGETHER IS A
BEGINNING. KEEPING
TOGETHER IS PROGRESS.
WORKING TOGETHER IS
SUCCESS."

- Henry Ford

ABAC Members Address Industry Challenges at May Quarterly Meeting

Industry experts and legal counsel share tools for navigating today's repair environment.

The most recent quarterly meeting of the Auto Body Association of Connecticut (ABAC) was held on May 6, 2026, at The Woodwinds in Branford.



Presiding over the meeting, ABAC President Bob Amendola welcomed attendees, thanked members for taking the time to attend, and outlined the evening's agenda. Addressing some of the current concerns facing the collision repair industry, Amendola spoke candidly about the growing challenges repair facilities face when dealing with insurance companies.

"The unwillingness of insurance companies to properly take responsibility for their customers has become a real issue," said Amendola. ***"The 'take it or leave it' attitude from insurers is becoming critical for our businesses. Does anyone else in this room remember a time more challenging than right now? I can't think of one."*** He continued by discussing the importance of adapting business practices in today's repair environment.

"We are going to touch on some of the things we are doing — let's call them 'survival skills,'" he said. ***"I personally don't believe we can stay in business without adopting some of these skills. Cash flow is business, and even with litigation, these things take time — your time and your customer's time. It's your money, and you work hard for it."***

Amendola then announced several new ABAC News Ad Directory Supporting Advertisers:

- AMG Auto Services & Wheel Repair
- Capitol South CDJR – A Columbia Auto Group Dealership
- EGP Auto Glass
- Superior Auto Mobile ADAS Services
- Wile Hyundai – A Columbia Auto Group Dealership

He also welcomed the association's newest ABAC members:

- Ray's Automotive – Waterbury
- Capitol South CDJR – New London
- Circle Collision – Fairfield

"In a time of diminishing collision centers, Dave Fogarty still manages to find quality shops to join ABAC and share in the value of the association, and we thank Dave for his efforts" said Amendola.

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Election of Officers

The Auto Body Association of Connecticut then held its election of officers during the meeting. Re-elected to serve another term were:

- Bob Amendola – President
- Ashley Brunelle – Vice President

Additionally, two ABAC Board of Directors members were voted into officer positions, succeeding Mike and Mark Wilkowski, who have served the association in leadership roles for many years:

- Samantha Griswold, Atwood's Auto Appearance – Treasurer
- Kevin Clavette, Ace Auto Body – Secretary

Following the announcement, Amendola asked for a motion of approval from the membership in attendance. With all members in favor, the motion carried unanimously.

Lifetime Achievement Awards Presented

Following the election, President Amendola invited Mike Wilkowski to the front of the room to receive a Lifetime Achievement Award.

"Mike has been a past president, treasurer, and board member, and has been instrumental in guiding the Auto Body Association for many years — even decades," said Amendola.

Mark Wilkowski was also presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his longstanding dedication and service to the association.

"Mark has served as secretary and board member and, just like his brother Mike, has dedicated several decades to ABAC," Amendola said. ***"It truly is something special to see that level of commitment. Their dedication is second to none while asking for nothing in return."***

He continued, ***"Every time I leave a board meeting, I feel better for the conversations I've had with the Wilkowski brothers. Thank you both for the tremendous job you've done. We still look forward to your continued service as board members."***

Amendola also reflected on the challenges and rewards of volunteering in leadership positions within the industry. ***"Being an officer and board member is incredibly rewarding, but at times it can also be frustrating because we are all fighting the same battles,"*** he said. ***"One of the things we are doing tonight is helping members with information and strategies that can help them better run their businesses."***

Referring to conversations regarding customer communication, Amendola added: ***"Ashley said it best earlier this year when she told me, 'It feels like a weight has been lifted off your shoulders when you honestly explain to customers what is happening with their vehicle and why repair costs are what they are.' The price of repairs is the price of repairs."***

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Sponsors & Industry Presentations

The evening also featured presentations from several industry professionals and ABAC supporters.

The Co-Sponsors for the evening were North and Collision Tools Inc.

North



Greg Tino of North addressed attendees regarding payment processing solutions and financial technology services for businesses. Founded in 1992, North provides integrated payment solutions and merchant services for businesses of all sizes throughout the United States.

Up next was **Tim DiPersio of Collision Tools Inc.**, a company specializing in OEM-recommended collision repair equipment sales, service, and training. DiPersio discussed advancements in repair equipment and highlighted several systems widely used throughout the collision repair industry, including Pro-Spot Welding systems and Spanesi repair equipment.

Our Primary Sponsor was Buckley, Wynne & Parese

ABAC Legal Counsel John M. Parese then addressed attendees. Parese's firm, Buckley, Wynne & Parese, has long served as a Platinum Sponsor of the ABAC News.

As always, Parese delivered an informative and entertaining presentation outlining the types of cases handled by his firm. He also introduced Attorney Chris Hernandez, who, along with Parese, regularly contributes legal articles to the ABAC News.



The focus of Parese's presentation centered on reassuring collision repair shop owners that any referrals made to his firm would receive experienced, high-quality legal representation.

Drawing on more than 20 years of involvement with both the collision repair industry and ABAC, Parese reflected on the relationships he has built throughout the years. He credited longtime friend and Lorensen Auto Wholesale Parts Director Dave Fogarty for first introducing him to many collision repair professionals across the region.

Parese also shared photographs highlighting his involvement with ABAC dating back to 2008 and discussed his participation in numerous regional and national industry events on behalf of the association.

"I worked really hard to earn your trust," said Parese. "Many of you — and I don't say this lightly — I consider dear friends. I've traveled with many of you, attended weddings and events, and we've done a lot together. I want to continue working with all of you and continue supporting the association moving forward. If you have someone who needs our services, please do not hesitate to reach out."

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Interactive Discussion Focuses on Insurance Challenges

Returning to the podium, President Amendola transitioned into an interactive discussion session focused on insurer short-pays, rising operational costs, and customer communication strategies. ***“These are topics your Board of Directors has been discussing for quite some time,”*** said Amendola. ***“The changes in our industry, the rising costs, and the unwillingness of insurance companies to properly mitigate losses have created a new reality for collision repair businesses. There’s a new horizon. I’m sure most of you feel it”***

“I’d like to bring up Ashley Brunelle from Autoworks of Westville, Jillian Dawley from Dawley’s Auto Service, Samantha Griswold from Atwood’s Auto Appearance and Tony Cavalarro Jr from Airport Auto Body and they will share with you what they are doing with customers in cases where you have an insurance company that will not pay for certain items and how to present this to your customer,” continued President Bob.



The panel discussed how repair facilities are handling situations where insurance companies refuse to pay for certain repair procedures or associated costs, and how shops can professionally communicate those issues to customers.

“As I’ve said many times before, we can no longer absorb these costs as a business,” Amendola explained. ***“Presented professionally, customers will need to understand and take responsibility for the shortcomings of the insurance company. Properly educating your customer can help both you and your customer be satisfied.”***

Topics discussed during the session included:

- Educating customers on potential financial responsibility
- Real-world customer conversation examples
- Creating standard operating procedures
- Handling insurer short-pays with confidence
- Filing complaints with the Department of Insurance
- Implementing these processes into everyday business operations
- Open discussion and Q&A with attendees

This concluded the evening’s program, but not before several lucky attendees walked away with raffle prizes.

The information shared during the meeting represented just a sampling of the valuable knowledge and resources ABAC provides its members through its membership meetings and ongoing industry involvement.

Your ABAC Board of Directors continues to work hard to bring members educational opportunities, industry insights, guest speakers, and practical solutions designed to help collision repair businesses remain successful and profitable in today’s challenging environment.

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Ultimately, it is up to each individual shop owner to continue making that success possible. Reach out to your industry colleagues and encourage them to attend the next meeting. There is strength in numbers, and ABAC remains committed to helping member shops continue on their path to success.

We hope to see even more members at the next ABAC meeting. Please watch your email for upcoming announcements and meeting information.

Submitted by Don Cushing



ABAC Vice - President Ashley Brunelle

At our most recent quarterly meeting, members had the opportunity to participate in a timely and practical discussion surrounding one of the most challenging issues facing collision repair facilities today: **customer out-of-pocket expenses.**

The panel consisted of Tony Cavallaro Jr. (Airport Road Auto Body, Jillian Dawley (Dawley Custom & Collision), Samantha Griswold (Atwood's Auto Appearance) and myself. Our intention was to help fellow shops navigate these conversations with confidence and consistency. While these discussions can be uncomfortable, we emphasized that they are not confrontational.

One of our primary goals of the presentation was to provide attendees with tools that can be used as a foundation for their own business. Every shop operates differently, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. However, having a clear, documented process helps ensure consistency among staff and sets proper expectations with customers from the very beginning of the repair process.

We also shared examples of wording and talking points that many successful shops use when discussing out-of-pocket costs. The language we choose matters. Clear, honest communication helps customers understand why certain charges may exist and reinforces the shop's role as an advocate for proper and safe repairs.

Perhaps the most impactful portion of the presentation was listening to several recorded customer conversations from shops that have already implemented these procedures. These real-world examples demonstrated that when expectations are established early and communicated transparently, customers are often far more understanding than many shop owners anticipate. In fact, the recordings highlighted that having a structured process in place can significantly reduce tension and uncertainty for both staff and customers.

The key takeaway from the discussion was simple: difficult conversations become much easier when they are part of a well-defined system. Shops that communicate openly, remain consistent, and educate customers throughout the repair process are finding success in navigating the evolving landscape of out-of-pocket expenses.

Thank you to everyone who attended and contributed to the discussion. The willingness of our members to share their experiences, challenges, and solutions continues to be one of the greatest strengths of ABAC. We look forward to continuing these important conversations and providing resources that help our members adapt and thrive in a changing industry.

Mike & Mark Wilkowski Reflect on a Lifetime of Service to the ABAC



Few individuals have devoted as much time, energy, and passion to the Auto Body Association of Connecticut as Mike and Mark Wilkowski. Throughout their careers, both men have played significant roles in helping shape the association and strengthen Connecticut's collision repair industry.

Mike served as ABAC President from 1999 to 2000, while Mark has faithfully served as ABAC Secretary since 2003. Together, they have witnessed decades of change within both the association and the industry itself.

The Wilkowski brothers also carry on a family legacy that began in 1947 when their father, Stanley Wilkowski, founded Stanley's Auto Body.

"Our father understood that his customers were neighbors and friends," Mike explains. "He provided as much personal help as possible, and his passion for cars led him to strive for perfection when repairing them. As our customers will confirm, those attitudes continue to guide us today."

Recently, I sat down with Mike and Mark to discuss their involvement with ABAC, the evolution of the collision repair industry, and the importance of association membership.

Getting Started with ABAC

How did each of you first become involved with the Auto Body Association of Connecticut?

Mike: I can tell you exactly when it started—1972. I had just gotten out of the service in April and came to work at the shop. At that time, my father was an officer in the Waterbury Auto Body Association. He suggested that I attend a meeting with him.

You have to remember that back then there were individual chapters throughout the state, and they all operated independently. Each chapter had its own officers. It wasn't one large statewide organization as it is today. My father sparked my interest in the association and its inner workings, which eventually led me to become more involved.

Mark: "Follow the leader!" That's really how it started for me—following my brother Mike.

What motivated you to volunteer your time and eventually take leadership roles within ABAC?

Mike: The biggest influence was my father. He was heavily involved in the association and always understood the value of giving back. We felt it was beneficial not only for the industry, but also for our own business.

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8 Golfers | Banner at Registration & Lunch | 4 Tee Signs
 4 Golfers | Banner at Lunch | 2 Tee Signs
 2 Golfers | Banner Sponsoring Grand Prize | 2 Tee Signs
 2 Golfers | Banner as Lunch Sponsor | 2 Tee Signs
 2 Golfers | Branding on Giveaway Bag | Banner at Lunch | 2 Tee Signs
 2 Golfers | Branding on Player Carts | Banner at Lunch | 2 Tee Signs
 2 Golfers | Signage at Breakfast | Banner at Lunch | 2 Tee Signs
 2 Golfers | Signage on Beverage Cart | 1 Tee Sign
 1 Golfer | Signage on Longest Drive Hole
 1 Golfer | Signage on Closest to the Pin Hole
 Exclusive Signage on a Hole
 Signage on Tee Box

Tournament Contact:
Joe Cavallaro | 860-729-4766 | joe@airportroadautobody.com

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We're proud to bring together industry professionals, partners, and friends for a great day on the course in support of a meaningful cause. Proceeds from this event help strengthen the Association, support our member shops, and advance initiatives that benefit the auto body industry across Connecticut.

AGENDA

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------------------|
| 8:30 AM | Golf Registration & Breakfast |
| 9:30 AM | Shotgun Start |
| 2:30 PM | Lunch, Awards, Raffle |

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Tournament Contact: Joe Cavallaro | 860-729-4766 | joe@airportroadautobody.com

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Attending meetings showed me how important it was to stay informed about industry changes and then share that information with our employees.

Mark: It was simply a good thing to do. There were a lot of older people there—people much smarter than me at the time—and I listened and learned from them. I loved the auto body industry. I used to ride my bike to the shop after sixth grade and work there after school and on Saturdays. From an early age, I knew this was what I wanted to do.

Do you remember your first ABAC meeting? What stood out to you?

Mike: Even though it was a long time ago, I still remember parts of it. What stood out most was meeting some of the true leaders in our industry. The person who impressed me the most was Vinnie DiLauro of Columbus Auto Body in New Haven. Vinnie was someone I looked up to for many years. He was a class act and a true gentleman.

Leadership & Service**Mike, what were some of the biggest challenges you faced as ABAC President?**

Mike: I served as President in 1999 and 2000. One of our biggest challenges was membership growth. We all worked hard to expand membership and keep the association moving forward. Finances were always a concern as well. There were times when members paid their dues early simply to help keep the association solvent.

Mark, serving as Secretary for many years, you've witnessed countless changes. What stands out the most?

Mark: I couldn't believe how ruthless some insurance companies were becoming. That was one major change. The other was technology. The advancements we've seen over the years have been incredible.

What qualities are most important for someone serving in an association leadership role?

Mike: Listen to your membership. You may think you have great ideas, but you have to keep your ears and your mind open. Other people have experiences that you haven't had. They may have faced the same challenges and solved them differently. That exchange of information is what keeps organizations strong and moving forward.

Looking back, what accomplishments are you most proud of?

Mike: One of the biggest accomplishments was helping establish the ABAC News and the ABAC News Advertisers Directory. Meeting with you, Don, and Dave Fogarty back in 2000 and listening to your proposal really changed the direction of the association. The publication provided a new source of financial stability and allowed us to focus more on serving members rather than constantly worrying about finances.

Mark: For me, it's the people I've met along the way. Past presidents, Mike Brunt, and so many others who have contributed to the association. My biggest accomplishment was serving as ABAC Secretary for 23 years. It has truly been an honor.

Industry Evolution**How has the collision repair industry changed since you first joined ABAC?**

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Mark: It has become much more complicated in every direction. Body repair techniques have evolved dramatically. As a painter, I've seen paint technology progress from lacquer to enamel and beyond. Vehicle construction has also changed, moving from traditional body-on-frame designs to today's lightweight unibody structures. The changes have been constant and challenging.

What were some of the biggest issues facing repair shops during your early years compared to today?

Mark: Direct Repair Programs. I knew they would become a major issue, and they've remained a constant challenge for collision repairers.

How has technology changed the way shops operate and how associations support members?

Mike: Customer relations have changed dramatically. Years ago, customers walking into repair facilities often had to watch where they stepped because of oily floors and greasy parts. Today's successful shops understand the importance of making a positive impression.

Technology has also provided sophisticated tools that improve both repairs and customer service. Associations benefit as well. Just look at how Zoom meetings now allow members to connect, share information, and learn from one another regardless of location.

Were there any legislative or insurance-related battles that particularly impacted Connecticut repairers?

Mark: Direct Repair Programs had a tremendous impact, not only in Connecticut but throughout the country.

Mike: The aftermarket parts issue was another major battle. Before aftermarket parts became widespread, there were rust repair panels. Then insurance companies began pushing less expensive alternatives for repairing customers' vehicles. That changed the industry significantly.

The Value of ABAC

What role has ABAC played in protecting and supporting independent repair shops?

Mike: Education has always been the key. In the beginning, training was fairly basic, but it continually evolved. ABAC has always focused on helping repairers improve their businesses and remain profitable. Through educational programs, training opportunities, and quality guest speakers, the association has consistently provided valuable resources for members.

Why are industry associations still important today?

Mike: Without organizations like ABAC, repairers would be left to accept whatever insurance companies dictate. The insurance industry is highly organized and well educated. Associations keep repairers informed, educated, and prepared to defend proper repair procedures and business practices.

What advice would you give younger shop owners who may not yet see the value of association membership?

Mike: Anyone entering the collision repair industry should become involved with their association as early as possible. The information you gain is invaluable. Fortunately, I see many younger shop owners embracing professionalism and becoming more engaged. If you attend an ABAC meeting, you'll see the future of our industry sitting in the audience.

What has always made ABAC unique?

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Mike: The people. The men and women who serve on the Board of Directors are the engine that drives this organization. Their dedication, involvement, and willingness to volunteer their time make ABAC special. The current board continues a tradition established by many outstanding leaders who came before them.

Looking Ahead**What concerns do you have about the future of the collision repair industry?**

Mark: Personally, I'd like to see a third generation continue the mission at Stanley's Auto Body. Growth isn't my primary concern. Maintaining quality repairs and customer satisfaction is what matters most, and that comes from running the business properly.

Mike: One of the biggest challenges is finding qualified employees. There's a growing gap between experienced technicians and the next generation entering the workforce.

What opportunities do you see for future repairers?

Mike: The next generation may actually find it easier to adapt because today's vehicles rely heavily on electronics and technology. ADAS calibrations are a perfect example. Younger technicians often have a natural comfort level with technology that can help them succeed in this environment.

What advice would you give future ABAC officers and board members?

Mike: Surround yourself with people who are smarter than you. Serving on the Board is invaluable. If you spend all your time inside your shop, there are lessons and experiences you'll never encounter. Be willing to listen, learn, and remain open to new ideas.

Final Thoughts**What has ABAC meant to you personally?**

Mike: ABAC gives me the ability to reach out to colleagues whenever I encounter a challenge or obstacle. The knowledge and support available through the association help keep me moving forward.

Mark: Sharing information and collaborating with intelligent people has always been invaluable. The friendships and professional relationships developed through ABAC are something special.

Is there anything else you'd like ABAC members to hear?

Mike: If you want to move forward, you must be willing to give up a portion of yourself—and that portion is time. The time I've invested in ABAC has been returned to me many times over through knowledge, friendships, and opportunities. The experience has been tremendously rewarding for both Mark and me, and we're grateful for every minute we've spent serving this association.

The ABAC News would like to extend its sincere thanks to Mike and Mark Wilkowski for taking the time to share their memories, experiences, and insights with our readers. Their decades of dedication to the Auto Body Association of Connecticut and the collision repair industry have helped shape the organization we know today. The knowledge, leadership, and commitment they have demonstrated throughout their careers serve as an example for current and future generations of repairers. We are grateful for their many years of service and wish them continued success in both their business and their ongoing support of the industry they have helped strengthen.

Submitted by Don Cushing

Connecticut SkillsUSA Champion Daniel Garcia Represents the Best of Collision Repair Education

Editor's Note

In our March-April 2026 edition of the ABAC News, an incorrect photograph was inadvertently published with our article about Connecticut SkillsUSA Gold Medal winner Daniel Garcia. We are pleased to present the correct photo of Daniel, shown hard at work in the collision repair field. We apologize for the error and hope this updated article provides our readers with accurate and current information about this outstanding student.



According to Robert Turcotte, Department Head of Collision Repair Technology at Wilcox Technical High School, Daniel Garcia is a highly deserving recipient of Connecticut's SkillsUSA Gold Medal.

"Daniel is one of the most polite and positive students I have had in many years," said Turcotte. "He is a Work-Based Learning (WBL) student working at Brothers Auto Body in Cromwell, Connecticut, and is a great example of how students obtain successful careers through the WBL program."

Daniel's success highlights the effectiveness of Connecticut Technical Education and Career System's Work-Based Learning program (WBL). Through WBL, students are able to work for industry employers during their trade instructional time, earning both academic credit and a paycheck while gaining valuable real-world experience.

Available at all CTECS schools, the WBL program helps students develop workforce readiness skills such as punctuality, preparedness, teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking. The program creates a smooth transition from the classroom to the workplace and helps

employers develop the next generation of skilled technicians.

Through legislation enacted by the Connecticut Department of Labor, CTECS students aged 16 and older are permitted to work in all trades, including high-hazard occupations. Each school has a dedicated Work-Based Learning Coordinator who supports both students and industry partners throughout the process.

Turcotte also praised the Auto Body Association of Connecticut for its longstanding commitment to collision repair education and workforce development.

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"The Auto Body Association of Connecticut deserves a huge thanks," said Turcotte. "They are the only organization that consistently supports our Collision Repair Program without being asked. Through their annual golf tournament, they donate proceeds to support students, developed the Lyft transportation program to address student transportation needs, hire and train students through the Work-Based Learning Program, and continually invest in the future of our industry."



The ABAC also covered the \$1,367 cost of Daniel's participation in the SkillsUSA National Championships, helping ensure that Connecticut's top collision repair student could compete on the national stage.

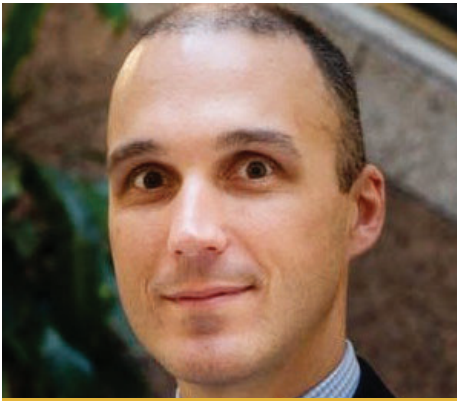
For many years, the Auto Body Association of Connecticut has quietly supported collision repair education throughout the state. Daniel Garcia's achievements serve as an excellent example of how industry support, dedicated educators, and motivated students can work together to build successful careers and strengthen the future of the collision repair profession.

The ABAC congratulates Daniel Garcia on his outstanding accomplishments and wishes him continued success in his career.



Submitted by Don Cushing

ABAC Government Relations Update



Andy Markowski, Esq.
Statehouse Partners, LLC
ABAC Lobbyist

2026 STATE LEGISLATIVE SESSION RECAP: WHAT PASSED, WHAT FAILED, AND WHAT'S NEXT FOR REPAIRERS

The Connecticut General Assembly adjourned its 2026 legislative session in early May, bringing to a close a fast-paced “short” session that saw more than 1,200 bills introduced and roughly 200 measures approved. While many proposals affecting repairers never made it across the finish line, several issues ABAC monitored closely either advanced this year or are positioned to return during the 2027 session.

The 2026 session was shaped in many ways by both federal policy debates and Connecticut’s approaching election season, resulting in a legislature that was often reacting to outside events while also positioning for November’s elections. As lawmakers return to their districts, attention in Hartford is quickly shifting from policymaking to campaigning.

One notable development this session was the unanimous confirmation of Josh Hershman as Connecticut’s new Insurance Commissioner. While not a legislative policy change, new leadership at the Insurance Department is important given the agency’s role in overseeing insurer conduct, claims handling, and consumer protection issues that affect repairers and vehicle owners alike.

TOWING REFORMS MOVE FORWARD

Towing remained a major focus at the Capitol for a second consecutive year. While House Bill 5465, the primary towing bill ABAC had been following, did not ultimately pass as a standalone measure, many of its provisions were incorporated into Senate Bill 413, which was approved by the legislature.

The final legislation continues the state’s effort to refine and standardize towing and storage practices following last year’s significant nonconsensual towing reforms. Among other changes, the bill establishes a state-managed online portal to help vehicle owners locate towed vehicles, updates procedures involving abandoned vehicles, and incorporates recommendations developed through the DMV-led towing working group.

Although towing may not appear to be a collision repair issue at first glance, how vehicles move from the crash scene to a repair facility can directly affect cycle time, storage costs, customer service, and insurer interactions. As a result, towing policy is likely to remain an active issue in future legislative sessions.

ADAS, GLASS, AND INSURANCE ISSUES WILL BE BACK

One issue that deserves particular attention from repairers is the growing debate surrounding auto glass replacement, insurance claims practices, and ADAS calibration requirements.

Earlier this year, House Bill 5262 included language requiring Connecticut to study a model auto glass law developed by the National Council of Insurance Legislators (NCOIL). While that bill failed to advance, the proposal later resurfaced in House Bill 5371.

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That bill passed the House but ultimately died in the Senate before adjournment.

Although the proposal was framed as a study, the broader discussion is significant. Across the country, NCOIL model legislation has focused on issues such as insurance claims handling, assignment of benefits, glass replacement procedures, and calibration requirements. As more vehicles rely on cameras, sensors, lane-keeping systems, automatic emergency braking, and other advanced driver assistance technologies, proper calibration following windshield replacement has become a critical safety issue.

The fact that this issue appeared in multiple bills this year suggests it is unlikely to disappear. ABAC fully expects lawmakers, insurers, glass interests, and other stakeholders to revisit the issue during the 2027 session. Given the increasing prevalence of ADAS-equipped vehicles, this is an issue that extends well beyond the glass industry and has implications for repair quality, consumer safety, and insurer reimbursement practices.

TIRE STEWARDSHIP EXPANSION STALLS

Another issue ABAC monitored closely did not make it across the finish line.

House Bill 5157 would have expanded Connecticut's tire stewardship program by requiring tire retailers to participate beginning in 2027. The bill passed the House but failed to receive final approval in the Senate before adjournment.

While the legislation is dead for now, lawmakers are likely to revisit retailer participation as Connecticut continues implementation of its tire stewardship program. Shops that sell or install tires should continue to keep an eye on this issue.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT REMAINS A PRIORITY

Workforce shortages continue to be one of the most significant challenges facing repair facilities across Connecticut.

While Senate Bill 135, concerning the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECH), did not pass before adjournment, workforce development remained a major focus throughout the session. Governor Lamont issued Executive Order 26-2 establishing the Connecticut Career Pathway Commission, which has been tasked with identifying ways to better align education, workforce training programs, and employer needs across key industries. Lawmakers also approved House Bill 5003, a broad workforce and labor package that included several initiatives aimed at workforce recruitment, training, and retention.

For the collision repair industry, the challenge remains unchanged. Connecticut's technical high schools continue to be one of the primary pipelines for future technicians, yet employers throughout the state continue to report difficulty finding qualified workers. As policymakers continue to focus on workforce issues, ABAC will be working to ensure the industry's needs are part of that conversation.

LOOKING AHEAD: ELECTION SEASON BEGINS

With the legislature now adjourned, attention in Hartford is rapidly shifting from policymaking to politics.

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Connecticut voters will elect a Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Comptroller, Treasurer, Secretary of the State, and all 187 members of the General Assembly this November. Governor Ned Lamont is seeking a third term, while Republicans have rallied behind State Senator Ryan Fazio. Legislative races are also expected to be highly competitive, particularly in several suburban districts that could determine the balance of power and committee leadership heading into the 2027 session.

The political landscape is also changing inside the Capitol itself. Longtime Senate President Pro Tempore Martin Looney recently announced he will retire after more than four decades in the legislature, setting up a significant leadership transition within the Senate Democratic caucus. Combined with numerous legislative retirements from both parties and a statewide election year, the 2027 session could look noticeably different than the one that just adjourned.

The final state budget was approved with bipartisan support and included additional municipal aid and spending adjustments. However, affordability, energy costs, workforce shortages, insurance costs, and the overall cost of doing business remain major concerns likely to dominate both the election season and the next legislative session.

For ABAC members, advocacy does not stop when the legislature adjourns. Many of the issues affecting repairers—from insurance practices and vehicle technology to workforce development and towing—continue to evolve year-round through state agencies, regulators, and stakeholder discussions.

ABAC will continue monitoring developments, engaging with policymakers, and advocating for practical, common-sense policies that reflect the realities facing Connecticut's collision repair industry. If there are issues affecting your business that you believe lawmakers or regulators should be paying attention to, we encourage you to contact the association and share your perspective.

The 2026 State Legislative Session May Be Over, But That Doesn't Mean Your Local Legislators Don't Need To Hear From You – Reach Out Now And Tell Them What Matters To You, The ABAC, And Connecticut's Collision Repair Industry!

Have a question? Want to express your opinion? Just want to know who now represents you in Hartford? Go to the website below and enter your home or business address to look up your state legislators; with a few quick clicks you can visit their official webpage, email them, or get their office phone number to make a call. Remember – as an ABAC member, your voice matters!

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/cgafindleg.asp>

As always, if you have questions on legislation or regulations or if you would like more information on an issue, please feel free to contact ABAC Lobbyist Andy Markowski at: (860) 707-3620 or andy@statehouselobbying.com.

*Information provided in this article is for educational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice.

Andy Markowski

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